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ABSTRACT

Noting that in the Europe of 1500 few people could read and write but that by 1800 the era of mass literacy had arrived, this book documents that momentous critical change and its implications. Using as a base a wide-range analytical survey, the book explores the place of literacy and education in social structures and social change in Europe between the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution. It draws examples from all over the continent, and concentrates on the experiences of ordinary men and women, rather than just the privileged, exceptional few. Central themes in the book are: (1) the nature of education in early modern Europe; (2) the extent of reading and writing among the population; and (3) the uses to which literacy was put. The book points out that the ways in which education and literacy relate to political, economic, and social structures are both more complex and more revealing than is usually allowed. In combining analysis with factual detail in a clear and direct presentation (and using material from all European languages), the book presents an absorbing and vivid social history of early modern Europe itself. An extensive bibliography concludes the book. (NKA)

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